

[Tom Barker]

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TALES-LEGENDS HEROES-OUTLAWS FOLKLORE

Mrs. Ada Davis, P.W.

McLennan County, Texas.

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Interview with Tom Barker, Waco, McLennan County, Texas.

Thomas J. Barker of Waco belongs to the Old West. Alert to both present and the past at eighty-three, his best possession is a background full of daring deeds as cowboy, ranger, Indian fighter, farmer of means.

Barker was born in Bell County of a pioneer family. In early boyhood he became acquainted with the saddle and the gun. His uncle, Jessie Mumford, was a close freind of Buffalo Bill with whom he scouted and hunted, and after Jessie Mumford moved to Bell County, Barker heard many tales about the famous scout. In '75 Cody left his home in north Dakota to spend three weeks with Mumford. During his visit Tom Barker "dogged his heels as steadily as ever did a St. Barnard his master". Barker found Buffalo Bill "Approachable and pleasant and easy to talk to as a neighbor."

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Cody's long hair and beard attracted little attention at that time since most of the men had shaggy faces, except on Sunday when "the family scissors were sparingly used". He was very fond of his gun, a 44. Winchester which he kept always near him and with which he practiced shooting daily.

The second time Tom Barker met Buffalo Bill was at Temple, years later, when the scout's show came there. Cody greatly astonished Barker when after a brief moment he recognized him as the boy whom he had seen at Jess Mumford's. Cody spent two nights with Barker. C12 - 2/11/41 - Texas

In '79 Barker's family made their home in Tom Green County where they ranched considerably. Their [gerds?], sometimes as many as 5,000 heads, were driven to Kansas City by the Old Fort Phantom Hill route and it usually took three months to make a drive. Tom Barker rode on the 2 drives for four successive years, '74 to '77. "Those drives[?]" he says, "Could be grim and dangerous; they were not the jolly affairs of the movies. We would lose boys now and then from accidents on the trail or gun fights in the towns. Stampedes were not unusual, and there were long thirsty days exhausting to both men and beasts. but all in all, those were great days and it was a great life."

During his lifetime "necktie parties" were frequent. When only a boy Tom Barker saw seven men hanging to a post oak tree one morning near Rockdale and Freezout in Milan County, Texas. Their crime was stealing horses, which was a frequent offence among outlaws in those days. Once a really good man, Wash Herbut, who had leave of absence from the Confederate Army, was hanged by a mob of "Jay Hawkers" at old Curry Spring in Milan County.

An event well remembered by oldtimers was the time when nine horse thieves were killed one night in Bell County jail in the middle '70's. Barker has good reason to be able to tell this story.

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For weeks a party of thieves had been working in their neighborhood. They took refuge along the river and roved over the country in search of good horses. The thing that incensed Tom Barker was the fact that the outlaws would strip and go swimming in front of his aunt's house. The [reward?] for their capture was \$150., and so Barker made a deal with the sheriff, despite his warning of danger. While riding towards the woods with a good horse in tow, Barker was chased and shot at by Sheriff Walker and his deputies,. Taking refuge in the brush, there he spent three days, knowing well enough that the band of thieves were watching him closely, but never actually seeing them. On the fourth day he was hailed by them and soon gained their confidence. He offered to get them some grub through his aunt who lived nearby. Finding out their anxiety to do another 3 "horses sally", he told them about Old Man Embrey's fine pair of horses no north of town that were usually staked out at night. They eagerly accepted the suggestion and immediately formed plans to obtain the horses that night, while Barker went to hustle some food.

Through his relatives Barker sent word to the sheriff and the thieves were caught in the act of stealing the Embrey horses. The thieves suspected Barker and threatened to kill him "when they got free". But that night a group of citizens broke into the jail and shot the nine prisoners. The identities of the mob and the thieves were never known. Barker says, "Those thieves were though birds, heavily bearded and pepped up on liquor".

Parson Ferguson and his sons, one of whom became the stormy "Farmer Jim", Governor of Texas and the center of Texas political life for twenty years, were friends of Tom Barker. Once Barker took of the birth of a child who in later years was well known in the United States as Mirian [("Ma")?] Ferguson, the wife of Former Jim and the Governor of Texas twice herself.

Barker spent four years and eight months as a ranger in the late '70's and early 80's. They had periods of dull [momotony?] in camp and then weeks of fast exciting action. Their chief work was against the Indians, but they had encounters with cattle rustlers.

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Barker killed an Indian chief of some consequence at Big Devil's River north of the Iron Mountains in '78. Captain Head was their leader and they had, had many brushes with a pack of Indians a number of times. Their cheif owned a fine horse to which Captain Head took a fancy. He offered to give \$100. to the man who would get the paint horse for him.

Not long after that the red men attacked them about four o'clock one morning and attempted to stampede the rangers' horses. The rangers 4 followed them and caught up with them about ten o'clock. Tom Barker, on a big bay, saw that the chief was starting his retreat when the fight became hot, and headed straight for the chief. Avoiding his tomahawk, he finally shot him, and after chasing the paint horse for a mile, he roped him.

He collected the reward from the captain, whom he met years later in Waco and who told him that he kept that Indian horse untill he died of old age about twenty years after his capture. The .41 single-[action?] Colt with which Tom Barker shot this chief was carried by him for 45 years before he sold it to a man at Camp McArthur. Many times Barker has regretted this sale and wished for the gun.

Returning to Bell County, Barker acquired considerable property in the following the break-up of the Old West. His fame as a horticulturist spread throughout Central Texas.

John [Wesley?] Hardin, notorious Texas outlaw, who had more notches on his gun than Billy the Kid, was a personal friend of Tom Barker. Although a pleasant man of a good family, Hardin brought disaster to himself and several members of his family because of the career on which he started when he killed his first man at Belton. Of one instance of its effect on Hardin's family, Barker says, "Billy Hardin was walking between me and Ike Donnelly in Belton when he was shot down by Marshall Lyons. You know, it had become rather popular to 'kill a Hardin' and much injustice was done".